

# **Sturgeon River Watershed Partnership**

## **Terms of Reference**

### **Oct. 25, 2013**

#### **PURPOSE**

The Sturgeon River Watershed Partnership has two primary objectives:

- To build on the findings of the *Sturgeon River State of the Watershed Report* by developing a management plan for the Sturgeon River watershed
- To work together collaboratively on an ongoing basis to implement its recommendations.

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

The Partnership may include representation from the following stakeholders in the Sturgeon River watershed:

- One elected official plus an alternate from each of Lac Ste Anne County, Parkland County, Sturgeon County, Westlock County, City of Spruce Grove, City of St. Albert, City of Edmonton, Town of Onoway, Town of Stony Plain, Town of Bon Accord, Town of Gibbons, and Town of Morinville.
- One representative from each of Alexis 133 and Alexander 134 First Nations Reserves.

#### **VOTING**

One vote is assigned to each member municipality and First Nations representative. Quorum shall consist of 50% + 1 of the Partnership members. A chair and a vice-chair will be elected among the voting members at the first Sturgeon River Watershed Partnership meeting and subsequently each year thereafter.

Every reasonable effort will be made to achieve consensus in decisions and recommendations. Where consensus cannot be reached, decisions and recommendations of the Partnership will be made by simple majority vote provided that a quorum of members is present. Dissenting votes will be noted and recorded.

#### **MEETINGS**

Meetings of the Sturgeon River Watershed Partnership will be held a minimum of twice per year, or at the call of the Chairman or majority of voting members.

The North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA) will provide administrative support and will house the official records.

#### **TECHNICAL SUBCOMMITTEE**

The Sturgeon River Watershed Partnership Technical Subcommittee may consist of one staff and/or elected official representative from each member municipality and one representative from each member First Nations Reserve. The Subcommittee will provide technical support and advice to the Partnership. A chair and a vice-chair will be elected from the Subcommittee members at its first meeting and subsequently each year thereafter.

Representatives from provincial and federal governments (e.g. Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development; Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development; Alberta Transportation, or other ministries) may be invited to participate and provide expertise to the Technical Subcommittee. A representative from the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance will provide technical advice and administrative support to the Subcommittee.

## **PARTNERSHIP ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Address findings and recommendations of the *Sturgeon River State of the Watershed Report* (May 2012)
- Approve work plans proposed by the Technical Subcommittee
- Seek external funding sources (e.g. Regional Collaboration Grant, Green Municipal Fund)
- Report progress on achievements and successes after key milestones
- Ensure the *Sturgeon River Watershed Management Plan* (SRWMP) is prepared in consultation with local and regional stakeholders
- Approve the final SRWMP
- Integrate the SRWMP with municipal strategic and operational processes
- Ensure the SRWMP supports the overalls goals of the *Integrated Watershed Management Plan for the North Saskatchewan River* (NSWA 2012).

# Sturgeon River Watershed Partnership Background Document

## OVERVIEW

A partnership approach is being proposed to develop and implement a watershed management plan for the Sturgeon River watershed. The partnership would consist of municipalities and First Nations located within the watershed.

The proposed partnership has two primary objectives:

- To build on the findings of the *Sturgeon River State of the Watershed Report* by developing a management plan for the Sturgeon River watershed
- To work collaboratively on an ongoing basis to implement its recommendations.

This background document provides the context for the formation of the Partnership and will provide information on the following topics:

- The Sturgeon River watershed
- *Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability*
- Key Steps in Watershed Management Planning
- Work Completed in the Sturgeon River watershed to date
  - *Big Lake Task Force* (2007)
  - *Capital Region Growth Plan* – Capital Region Board (2010)
  - *Sturgeon River State of the Watershed Report* (2012)
  - *Integrated Watershed Management Plan for North Saskatchewan River in Alberta* (2012)– North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance
- Future Opportunities
  - Partnership Approach
  - Development of the *Sturgeon River Watershed Management Plan*

## STURGEON RIVER WATERSHED

A watershed is an area of land that contains streams and rivers that all drain into a single larger body of water such as a river, lake or ocean. A watershed contains farmlands, municipalities, forests, grasslands, wildlife and roads.

The Sturgeon River is a non-glacial river which flows approximately 260 km eastward from its headwaters upstream of Lake Isle to its confluence with the North Saskatchewan River near Fort Saskatchewan (see attached *Sturgeon River Watershed Map*). It incorporates a drainage area of approximately 3,301 km<sup>2</sup> and the watershed is home to a population of approximately 140,000.

## WATER FOR LIFE: ALBERTA'S STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABILITY

*Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability* was created by the Alberta Government in 2003 in response to conflicting and increasing pressures on Alberta's water supplies.

The three goals of the strategy are to preserve and maintain:

- Safe, secure drinking water supplies
- Healthy aquatic ecosystems
- Reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy

To achieve these goals, the strategy emphasizes action in three key areas:

- Knowledge and research
- Partnerships
- Water conservation

*Water for Life* identifies three types of partnerships to lead collaborative watershed planning in Alberta: (1) the Alberta Water Council; (2) Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils; and (3) Watershed Stewardship Groups.

The Alberta Water Council (AWC) is a multi-stakeholder partnership with members from governments, industry and non-government organizations. The Council works at a provincial scale to monitor and steward the implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy.

Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) are regional organizations with the mandate to engage governments, stakeholders, other partnerships and the public in watershed assessment and planning. WPAC boundaries are delineated on the basis of Alberta's major river basins. There are 11 WPACs in Alberta. The North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA) is the WPAC for the North Saskatchewan River watershed in which the Sturgeon River watershed is located. The NSWA takes a leadership role in watershed planning, state of the watershed reporting, outreach and education.

Watershed Stewardship Groups (WSGs) include a range of local organizations with diverse mandates. These groups undertake actions to raise awareness or physically improve their watersheds or local water bodies. As part of these actions, WSGs may undertake local watershed assessment and planning activities. The Sturgeon River Watershed Partnership would be classified as a Watershed Stewardship Group.

## KEY STEPS IN WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The Alberta Water Council published a document entitled *Recommendations for a Watershed Management Planning Framework for Alberta* which summarizes the watershed management process as six key activities: *collaborate, assess, plan, do, check, and react*.

<b><u>COLLABORATE</u></b>	Assemble stakeholders from the defined watershed area and form a partnership governed by principles of inclusiveness, transparency, consensus decision-making and shared learning.
<b><u>ASSESS</u></b>	Assess the current state of the watershed. This step helps to identify the key issues that need to be addressed in a plan.
<b><u>PLAN</u></b>	Prepare a watershed management plan. This plan establishes desired outcomes and outlines the actions needed to achieve them.
<b><u>DO</u></b>	Implement the actions in the plan.
<b><u>CHECK</u></b>	Monitor results and report to the partnership, public and others on the progress made towards achieving the outcomes identified in the plan.
<b><u>REACT</u></b>	Revise the watershed management plan, actions or outcomes to accommodate new circumstances or information.

## WORK COMPLETED IN THE STURGEON RIVER WATERSHED

### Big Lake Task Force (2007)

The Big Lake Task Force was a partnership of seven municipalities in the Sturgeon River watershed (City of Edmonton, City of Spruce Grove, City of St. Albert, Town of Stony Plain, Parkland County, Sturgeon County and Lac Ste. Anne County) that collaborated on the completion of a storm water master plan for the river basin. The main objectives of the plan were

to facilitate orderly development, prevent flooding problems downstream of development areas, protect the environment and plan for future generations. One of the major tasks of the plan was to discuss watershed issues with member municipalities and landowners, and to provide interim results to the public through a series of public meetings and presentations to municipal councils.

One of the recommendations from the *Big Lake Storm Water Master Plan* was that a watershed management plan should be developed for the basin. A multi-stakeholder group was organized and met between 2007 and 2009 to initiate this work. However, it was unable to collaborate effectively and made limited progress in watershed planning.

#### *Capital Region Growth Plan - Capital Region Board (2010)*

In response to increasing development in the Capital Region, the Government of Alberta approved *Growing Forward: the Capital Region Growth Plan* on March 31, 2010. The *Growth Plan* addresses a wide range of growth and development issues affecting the member municipalities by providing principles and policies that promote integrated, efficient and sustainable growth in the Capital Region. The primary purpose of the Land Use Plan component is to manage growth sustainably and in a manner that protects the region's environment and resources, minimizes the regional footprint, strengthens communities, increases transportation choice, ensures efficient provision of services and supports regional economic development. Within the core principle entitled *Protect the Environment and Resources* the key policies include:

- Preserve and protect the environment
- Preserve agricultural lands
- Protect natural resources
- Minimize the impact of development on regional watersheds and airsheds
- Minimize the impact of heavy industrial development.

#### *Sturgeon River State of the Watershed Report (2012)*

The preparation of a State of the Watershed Report represents the **ASSESS** step in watershed management planning under *Water for Life*. The purpose of a State of the Watershed Report is to summarize the current knowledge of the watershed with respect to land use, water quantity, water quality, fisheries and selected biological indicators, and to comment on the environmental integrity of the watershed.

St. Albert residents and City Council recognized the Sturgeon River as an important resource and were concerned about the health of the river. As a priority, St. Albert City Council wanted to complete a study to assess the health of the Sturgeon River flowing through St. Albert. Recognizing that the Sturgeon River within St. Albert is affected by the entire watershed, it was recommended that a watershed scale study be considered. To continue with the momentum of the *Big Lake Task Force* and the former multi-stakeholder group, the City of St. Albert funded and completed the *Sturgeon River State of the Watershed Report* in May 2012. This report provides an opportunity and a foundation to initiate a municipal partnership for the management of the Sturgeon River watershed. The report was created by the City of St. Albert for use by all stakeholders in the watershed including residents, regulators, policy makers, landowners and industry.

#### *Integrated Watershed Management Plan for North Saskatchewan River in Alberta (2012)*

The North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA) is a multi-stakeholder watershed protection and improvement partnership formed in 1997, and incorporated as a non-profit society in 2000. The NSWA provides a forum to recognize and address issues affecting the North Saskatchewan River (NSR) watershed in Alberta. It also initiates and supports activities that will positively impact the watershed. The NSWA is comprised of both individual citizen members and organizational members including: federal, provincial, and municipal governments; industries; utilities; agriculture producer groups; environment and conservation groups; recreation, culture, and tourism groups; and education and research institutions.

The four strategic goals for the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance are:

- Provide leadership in watershed planning at all scales through the provision of well-supported information and advice.
- Facilitate watershed research to address issues and inform management actions within the basin.
- Establish an ongoing collaborative planning and management framework for the basin.
- Establish a strong model for NSWA and ensure the organization is sustainable, with sufficient capacity and funding.

In July 2012 the NSWA published an *Integrated Watershed Management Plan for the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta*. The plan serves as advice to the Government of Alberta and all watershed stakeholders to guide future decision making in their respective areas of responsibility and interest. It identifies specific actions that should be implemented, describes the roles and responsibilities of the various players to do so, and presents an implementation strategy based on both voluntary and statutory activities.

## **FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES**

### Partnership Approach

Based on the success of the *Big Lake Task Force*, a partnership approach is being proposed to support the watershed management needs of the Sturgeon River basin. Formation of the Sturgeon River Watershed Partnership represents the **COLLABORATE** step of watershed management planning in Alberta. As community leaders, municipalities and First Nations councils have an important role to play in guiding watershed stewardship in their counties, cities, towns, villages, summer villages and Reserve lands. By working together to ensure a healthy Sturgeon River watershed all municipalities and First Nations will gain from the associated economic, social and environmental benefits.

### Sturgeon River Watershed Management Plan

A watershed management plan does not limit or stop growth, but provides effective guidance when making decisions about the types of activities and development occurring in a community. The development of watershed management advice involves collaborative, long-term thinking and proactive decision-making about key land and water management issues. Watershed plans serve to sustain the health of our aquatic ecosystems. This activity represents the **PLAN** stage of watershed management in Alberta.

Watershed management and the associated stewardship of natural resources are ongoing activities. The completion of watershed reports and watershed management plans are important foundational steps. The Partnership will provide future updates to the plan as new information is acquired and as conditions change. This continuum of work represents the **DO, CHECK, REACT** steps of watershed management in Alberta.